

ture, line and form is a fascinating one. After the art world's last few years of sterile political hectoring, her lush, poetic musings are welcome indeed.

—Michael Duncan

Jennifer Cross at Katharina Rich Perlow

Cross is a landscapist, but not in the relatively "easy" modes of the painterly realists or our current crop of naturalists. The small to epic canvases in this, her first solo show, mix Hieronymous Bosch, the Brothers Grimm and Jackson Pollock. They are singularly weird, astonishing, morbid, fantastic and particularly her own.

Some of the works have an inauspicious, dark ambience. *Landscape with Vessel* suggests the devastation of war in its thickets of scraggly brush, its dead trees and its painterly mush of wet earth, all set



Leslie Singer and Cecilia Dougherty: Video still from *Joe-Joe*, 1993, 52 minutes; at Segue Space.

beneath a sky of bright Novemberish blue and pale white. An iconic remembrance of civilization appears in the form of a vessel etched into the muck at bottom center of the canvas. The wing emblem that embellishes it seems to offer the option of flying out of this tangled mess: despite the devastation, Cross presents a possibility of transcendence or escape.

In a large oil-on-board diptych, she makes reference to Christian hopes of redemption through earthly suffering. A tiny St. Pasqual stands in a sprawling, Action-Painterly landscape of helter-skelter strokes, pools and splatters of blacks, grays, siennas and browns. Is this the fabled wilderness of Christian theology, which stands as the physical equivalent of St. John's

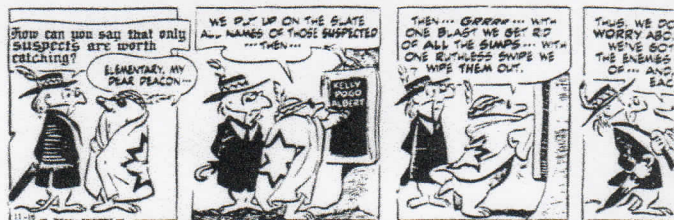
"dark night of the soul"—the dreadful spiritual territory one must traverse in order to come closer to God?

But for various references to religion, magic or mythology, Cross might well be taken as the Francis Bacon of contemporary landscape. The "ugly" nature seen in her paintings can stand as ecological commentary and as nifty, gutsy, psychologically dark abstract painting. Still, she seems to have a predilection for not abandoning hope. In her charming yet chilling oil on board, *Mask-Maker's House* (11 inches square, 1992), a thatched hut entangled in snarls of dead vine, seen through a gloomy thicket, sits under a sunset so flaming red that the horizon seems to be on fire. On and around the house are ferocious masks of African or European derivation. Maybe the way to get through Cross's symbolic dark forest is behind the disguise of one of these. Hope, they say, lies in going *through*, and not around, our most abysmal challenges. Cross offers plenty of opportunities. —Gerrit Henry

Cecilia Dougherty and Leslie Singer at Segue Space

"Imagine" is the first word that scrolls up on the screen in *Joe-Joe*, a 52-minute videotape by two San Francisco artists, Cecilia Dougherty and Leslie Singer. Seeing it, I remembered the same word scrawled in chalk across the black cube at Cooper Square the day after John Lennon was shot. *Joe-Joe* had its premiere here at Segue Space in the East Village under the auspices of the Opium Den, a loosely organized group of film and video artists committed to showing new experimental work in a variety of venues around town.

Joe-Joe was shot in Pixel-ision, a form of video originally intended for kiddies but quickly picked up on by artists of all ages because of its letter-box format and low resolution. *Joe-Joe* is a loose retelling of the life of '60s British playwright Joe Orton, author of *Loot* and the cultish subject of the feature film *Prick Up your Ears*. So the male domain of fame and success, as well as Orton's flagrant homosexuality, is being cheerily accessed by these artists. Here, though, both Dougherty and



Walt Kelly: *Pogo* strip from November 15, 1961, blue pencil, brush and ink on drawing board; at FDR Gallery. (Review on p. 130.)

Singer play the role of Joe, thereby sidestepping Orton's relationship with his live-in lover Kenneth Halliwell, which ended in both men's demise. This inspired device leads to all sorts of doubling: two black caps, two typewriters, and either or both actors answering questions directed at "Joe." More often than not, the questions are posed by Orton's agent, Peggy Ramsay, played exquisitely by San Francisco writer Kevin Killian.

Orton's libidinous excess, reports of which animated his diaries and which was baroque-ly touched upon in the film, is here turned into graphic sex scenes in a variety of bathrooms by our two stars. Joe in effect has sex with himself, though he's played by two women. Much more is at stake than a media establishment saturated by images of male fame when these two artists make love on screen. The exaltation of male desire and the backgrounding of female sexuality, specifically lesbian, is reversed and flipped forward into the public eye.

It's not the sex, however, that carries the greatest weight in this tape. An intimate bathtub scene, for instance, shot in a wandering, sculptural fashion, winds up feeling deeply familiar and strange at once, like any image dwelt on just long enough to confound. The limbs entwine, the water ripples. At one point a person's foot and ankle (Singer's) pillory the other's neck so that only a head wearing glasses (Dougherty's) continues the thread of the tale. Relationship is the constant subject matter of *Joe-Joe*. Time and again, flat, post-Warhol conversations with occasional tweaks of humor get carried on while a sensuous camera grooms the terrain, searching for a way out of this claustrophobic simplicity. This videotape, though often perversely funny ("Paul McCartney is coming *here*, to the Mission? Wonder if I should

change my bra real quick?") not an easy read. (*Joe-Joe* distributed by Data Bank.)

—Eileen M.

R. Crumb at Alexander

The R. Crumb retrospective Alexander was impressive scope, covering every period Crumb's career from 1958 to present, with an emphasis his classic 1960s work. Familiar characters like Mr. Natural, F The Cat, Flakey Foot, I Snoid, Angelfood McSpade well as the lesser-known Boir Baxter and Lenore Goldbe and Her Girl Commandos were all in evidence. But there were also wonderful surprises, including Crumb's notebooks, which reveal rough drafts for cartoons published in periodicals like *1 immensely popular Zap a Head Comix*. There was a series of one-of-a-kind letters a friend in comic-book form complete with color covers, a several examples of pen-and-ink sketches from Crumb's 0 previous gallery exhibition, 1966. And there was a tend

R. Crumb: From the *Barrow* sketchbook, 1966-68, pen and ink; at Alexander.

